1: Wilson E-5 (1934-1938) 1951 FN17 Ngonde FN17
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Food (other than meat) is provided on the day of the burial by the women of the home at which the burial takes place, on the succeeding day by visiting relatives, and on the third day by village neighbours. Women neighbours, like woman relatives, often bring gifts of bark-cloth belts (*amakiba*) with which to bind up the bellies of their bereaved friends, who are all atremble and full of fear, and so support them. These belts symbolize the sympathy of friends in the fearful grief of the mourners. 'If a woman wears many belts at a burial that means that she has many friends; her passionate grief is comforted by their friendship.'[1] And neighbours, like relatives and close friends from other chiefdoms, may bring cloths which are used to wrap the corpse and bind up the bellies of the chief mourners. But these gifts of food, firewood, belts, and cloth are the limit of a neighbour's obligations; very rarely does a neighbour bring a bull to kill for the funeral feast, whereas close kinsmen and affines are obliged to provide a bull or cow for this purpose if they have one. And neighbours take virtually no share in the elaborate ritual which follows for cleansing relatives from the contagion of death, driving the thought of the deceased out of their minds, and bringing back his spirit to bless the home. Their only part is to bring small gifts of millet from which to brew the beer drunk at the close of this ritual.

At an ordinary birth there is very little ceremony and the village as a group is not concerned, though close friends will help the mother during her confinement, fetching wood and water for her, and bringing occasional gifts of cooked food; but twin births are regarded as fearful and dangerous, and an elaborate ritual is performed to cleanse relatives from the contagion which, if left untreated, is believed to lead to serious swelling of the arms, legs, and stomachs, accompanied by diarrhoea. Relatives are treated with many medicines, while village neighbours are sprinkled with one only, but their cattle, especially the cattle herded with those of the man who has begotten twins, are thought to be in danger. At one twin ritual we watched there was some discussion whether all the cattle of the age-village should be treated, or only those of the herd-group to which the father of the twins belonged. Finally it was decided that on previous occasions all the cattle of the village had been treated, and a message was sent

[1] cf. Godfrey Wilson, 'Nyakyusa Conventions of Burial', *Bantu Studies*, Vol. XIII (1939), p. 12.

2: Wilson E-5 (1934-1938)1957 FN17 Ngonde FN17
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has lain with the dead man's wives. A brother will approach the corpse without fear. But there is another trouble: if a man seduces his brother's wife the husband may have diarrhœa perhaps with bloody stools. Many people do not come to their fathers' funerals before the burial. And also if the father is ill, and they see he is near death, they run away, returning when he has been buried. Because it is said that a man will die if he has slept with his mother, his father's wife, and sees his father or sees the corpse, as did Jones, the son of Kisokora. He slept with his mothers in secret. When his father died (in a different village from that in which Jones lived) Jones seized his father's cattle and ran away with them. When they had buried his father he came to mourn. The women with whom he had slept told on him because he had given them syphilis.

A wife who commits adultery with her husband's son is held to be in great danger also. Mwandisi said:

If they conceal it and approach the grave both the son and the wife will die. Both are washed naked, under a waterfall. The officiant washes them together with a fowl.

QUESTION: Why the waterfall and the nakedness?

MWANDISI: The water is to take away the sickness. Being naked is so that the case may go away and you, the man, may be empty (*bwasi*) and the woman may be empty. For if such a son looks into the grave and approaches to weep, the shades and Kyala are angry and say: 'Are you a relative? How can you look into the grave? It is you who have killed him, by causing him diarrhœa.' And if the woman approaches and holds her dead husband in her arms, then she dies. Those below are angry and say: 'Is she your relative?' And she dies. But if she has committed adultery with someone who is no relation she approaches and does not fear, and the adulterer does not fear either, but approaches.

For a woman, adultery is held to be dangerous also in childbirth:

If she has had lovers, she has a difficult delivery and the child refuses to come out until she confesses. Sometimes she confesses three, then the child comes, it comes out. . . . She confesses the name and takes a bit of stick and spits on it and throws it away, and you will be surprised to see that she gives birth at once. If she is very bad she will tell you three names and throw away three sticks.

Any contact with childbirth is held to be even more dangerous to men than contact with menstruation. It also is thought to cause weakness, and it is warriors who are most affected. Traditionally,

2: Wilson E-5 (1934-1938)1957 FN17 Ngonde FN17
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Traditionally,
● 844 no man entered the confinement hut in which a woman remained
[177] until the cord had dropped off the new-born child and she had purified herself, and she did not normally resume cooking for her husband for some weeks; but these taboos are less strictly observed than formerly, partly, our informants insisted, because the country has been pacified and men do not fear to die in battle if they neglect them.

The obvious interpretation here is that a man is felt to partake of the weakness of a menstruating or confined woman if he comes into association with her. 'His legs become swollen and painful and he is very tired'; 'strength leaves him'; 'he has no speed in running'; 'his belly aches and his body grows red'. . . . The picture is surely one of a *woman's* physical weakness: a man is identified with his wife during pregnancy, observing the taboos she observes, and during menstruation and confinement he must isolate himself as far as possible from her lest he share her weakness; but none of our informants make a connection between the weakness of the woman and the weakness of the man—the interpretation is ours. The Nyakyusa were obsessed with the idea of 'filth' emanating from menstruation and childbirth; indeed, the feeling that women, by reason of their physiology and the taboo on washing during menstruation, are dirty, is cited by men as one of the reasons for not eating with them or sitting to chat with them. Only in this limited sense is the conception of ritual impurity linked with social
[171 783] status. Here the contrast with a Hindu society, in which states of ritual impurity (basically very similar to those of the Nyakyusa) are linked with caste differences, is marked.[1]

842 The second general conception underlying the taboos of procreation is that of *ubusito*, heaviness, a condition associated with sexual intercourse, pregnancy, the python of witchcraft, and medicines.[2] A 'heavy' (*nito*) person is dangerous to an 'empty' (*bwasi*) one, hence women sleeping with their husbands, and pregnant women avoid mothers with infants and brides in seclusion, who are 'empty'; and the 'empty' are treated to prevent diarrhœa and give them weight. Diarrhœa and 'emptiness' are closely associated.

842 789 The great specific against 'emptiness' is *ikipiki* medicine, used in the puberty, birth, and death rituals, and even used to protect cattle against a menstruating woman. 'If a woman is the only wife

[1] cf. M. N. Srinivas, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India* (1952).
[2] cf. Monica Wilson, *Good Company*, p. 95.

2: Wilson E-5 (1934-1938)1957 FN17 Ngonde FN17
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coughing disease to the owners of the house. . . . Pagans used to fear to let those who are sleeping together touch the hearth-bricks or blow up the fire in their house for, if they do so, then the owners of the house, both man and woman, fall sick coughing. They say it is the disease of fires (*nyoto*). . . . But when a woman has borne a child and is suckling it, and her husband is not with her, then it is not taboo.

Making fire by friction and, in more general terms, fire, are symbols of sexual intercourse, and 'the fire of the body and the fire of the house fight'. Drinking from a calabash cup is perhaps also a symbol of intercourse—the shape of the cup suggests it—but there is no direct evidence of such an association.

The taboo on mixing the sex activities of different couples is pushed to the point that women avoid for a day the milk of a cow that has been with the bull. 'They say: "We will harm the cow. It will abort." They compare it with themselves as women.'

Two last pregnancy taboos may be noted which turn, not on the feeling that like things are antagonistic, but that like produces like. Things felt to be alike are treated as causally related. We quote Mwambupúta, the village headman:

> Women fear to stand in a doorway when they are pregnant. They say: 'How should the child stand in the doorway? It will refuse to come out.' Because if birth is delayed, it is as if the child refused to come out of the house. That is the symbol. And I, the husband, feared also [to stand in a doorway]. Now we men do not fear; it is finished; but women still fear.
>
> And another thing, when a woman was pregnant we feared to sit close together, I, the husband, and my child. It was taboo. And for my wife and another woman to sit close together was taboo. It was said that she would bear twins, because we had sat together. Now we men do not fear, but women still do.

(*b*) *The confinement*

A first confinement, like first menstruation, is the occasion for elaborate ritual, and though at later confinements (as at later menstrual periods) certain taboos must be observed, they are less numerous and less strictly enforced than those connected with the birth of the first child, *umwana gwa busungu*.

A first child should be born at the husband's mother's house, 'and if the first child is a girl they will tell her to come again for the second, saying: "Come that we may treat our husband [i.e. grandson]." ' The woman lies, during labour, on a heap of leaves

2: Wilson E-5 (1934-1938)1957 FN17 Ngonde FN17
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844 behind the huts, moving inside after delivery, on to a litter of banana leaves spread for her. Her mother-in-law attends her and treats her and the new-born child with *ikipiki* medicine. She washes them in a basin made of two banana leaves, one sweet banana, one plantain, and is particularly careful to wash the infant's mouth and the mother's vagina. Powdered *ikipiki* is sprinkled in the water in the form of a cross. This is done 'that the mother and child should not have diarrhœa'. The cross is a symbol of overstepping (*kukukiljana kuno, kukukilanya kuno*, demonstrating a cross) and is made 'because heavy ones, those who are with their husbands on the bed, will come and overstep the mother and child if they are not treated'. Mother and child are also given a roasted banana with powdered *ikipiki* sprinkled on it. In bringing the *ikipiki* the husband's mother acknowledges the legitimacy of the child. 'If someone does not give a child *ikipiki* it is a bastard. It is as if the husband said: "Why do you insult your husband by committing adultery with others? Others have created this foetus; it is not mine!" '

851 848

The cord is tied with a shred of bark-cloth and then cut with a bamboo knife. 'An iron knife is taboo, it's a spear, other children will die from the spear disease (*ulukuvgo*); to use a spear is like killing someone.' The after-birth is buried in the banana plantation with a piece of the cord sticking up, and later the litter is burnt at the same place. 'Only officiants (*abanyago*) eat of these bananas growing over the burying place—no young person may do so for it's the banana grove of the litter.' The cord must be buried upright or 'the mother will not bear again'.

845 775 A delayed delivery is most commonly attributed to the woman's adultery,[1] and she is pressed by the midwife to confess the name of her lover or lovers, but it is also believed that it may be due to *imisabi*, that is the shades. The husband consults a diviner who indicates whether the *imisabi* is on his side or that of the woman's father and the one who is thus indicated should pray. 'Sometimes the woman herself tells of a quarrel which would lead to *imisabi* and then her husband or father goes to pray.'

846 Mother and child remain in confinement until the navel cord drops off, sheltered from 'heavy ones', who should not enter or even greet the mother from the doorway, and from men, to whom both mother and child are dangerous. 'Men must not see a tiny

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[1] Unlike certain other Central African peoples, the Nyakyusa do not attribute difficulty in childbirth to the adultery of the husband.

2: Wilson E-5 (1934-1938)1957 FN17 Ngonde FN17
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him. They fear that if heavy ones come and speak, those who are pregnant, the child will suffer, it will become weak and exhausted on the litter, and will have constant diarrhœa. So they go to the cross-roads and mix millet flour and powdered *ikipiki* with the feather of a chicken, they give the child some in his mouth to make the motions firm, and close the bowels. They do this[1] at the cross-roads that those who pass may step over it and take the disease away. That medicine closes the bowel, it saves the stomach and bowel when heavy ones come, those who are pregnant. If we do not treat it the child becomes exhausted with diarrhœa, though the mother is all right.

It is taboo to give birth in the house, a woman bears a child outside on a pile of leaves; when she has borne the child they sprinkle powdered *ikipiki* on those leaves, but if I, the father, am angry about the child I refuse the *ikipiki*, saying: 'It's not my child, it's a bastard.' That is of old though. Now, in European times, they treat all children. Yes, now all are my children; formerly there were bastards. The *ikipiki* is our blood, it is kept in the senior wife's house.

There was some disagreement on this point. Nyani, an elderly man who was already married before Europeans came to the country, when asked: 'Do you perform rituals for bastards?' replied: 'Yes, they are born with[2] my cattle (*Bapapigwe munombe yanga*).' Four other men who discussed the matter together, agreed that—

When a woman has borne an illegitimate child we know that the child is the child of her husband because it was born with his cattle (*munombe yake*). Whether the child is a boy or a girl, whether the genitor is known or unknown, and whether he has paid damages or not, the children belong to the woman's lord (*mwene nkikala*). When an illegitimate child is born to an unmarried girl her fathers perform the ritual, for that 'man of the long grass' is like a bull. For an illegitimate child born to a married woman the rituals are performed by the husband, for the 'man of the long grass' is like a bull or a cock. Who is going to give a calf to a man alone, the bull who begot it?

But Lyandileko who, as a doctor and a grandmother, was intimately concerned in such matters, insisted:

If a woman has committed adultery and we do not know the man, we give her earth; it's just rubbish. If I give her medicine she and the child will die. If she has borne the child in the long grass and her father refuses to let her enter the house, non-relatives give it to her. If I, the mother, am there I give her this earth [touching the ground].

[1] The baby is not taken to the crossroads, only the *ikipiki* and millet flour.
[2] Literally within.

3: Mackenzie M-5 (ca. 1925) 1925
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861 romping glee; and the musical jingle of the tiny bells that most of them wear on their ankles up till three or so is pleasant to the European, and rings with a thrilling response in the heart of the adoring mother, who sits on the ground watching the gambols of her little one.

843 The unborn child is treated with great care, and surrounded with superstitions. The mother must submit to restrictions in regard to diet, and indications of the sex of the coming child are given by the preferences she shows for permitted foods. She must not eat hot food, for that would burn the child's head; nor beans, for they might cause the disease called *ilyulu*. An expectant mother who drinks much milk will bear a son; if she has a great desire for flesh foods, a daughter is known to be coming. A scolding woman need not be surprised if her child is a boy, especially if her husband is the victim of her language. Some women will not eat rice, perhaps because it is a new food, all the possibilities of which have not yet been fully explored.

• 844 The worst possible place for a woman to have her child born is at her own father's house, unless it is with the consent of her husband; for every one will assume that the child has an unknown father. If an [754] expectant mother suspects her husband of sorcery she will take care to have her child born at a distance, so that it may not inherit its father's undesirable powers, these being transmissible only at close quarters, and only after birth. With heathen women, the birth, if in the daytime, takes place mostly in the open

3: Mackenzie M-5 (ca. 1925) 1925
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air, as much privacy as possible being secured in the universal banana groves: and always in a sitting, not a lying position. 844

A difficult birth is a serious misfortune for the mother. Births are normally easy, and difficult labour indicates the wrath of the spirits for evil done. Medicine is in all cases given to facilitate delivery, and if this fails other means must be tried. A message is sent to the husband and the father of the woman, and prayer, without ceremony, for the matter is urgent, is offered by both men: 845 782

> "Ye fathers and ancestors, and ye who are of the far past, let this child be born safely. If I have sinned, be merciful; and if ye will not be merciful, kill me, but let the woman and the child live."

While thus praying he has been chewing the pith of a banana leaf, and at the end he takes water into his mouth, which he squirts out, saying, "Let my sin be carried away," and throws on the roof the chewed pith; for if he is not by birth the representative of the family he has no natural right to pray, but the ceremony of chewing and throwing on the roof averts evil consequences.

If all this fails it is clear that the woman has sinned; and her only hope of life for herself and her child lies in confession. The midwife takes a number of small sticks which she throws on the ground one by one, inviting the suffering woman to name the men with whom she has consorted. Natives assert emphatically that birth becomes easier after confession; 845 783

3: Mackenzie M-5 (ca. 1925) 1925
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845 and the statement cannot be altogether devoid of
783 truth. The influence of the mind upon the body is universally admitted: may it not be that the consciousness of guilt has the effect of contracting the muscles, and the relaxation which follows confession renders birth less painful? And may it not be that even a false confession, wrung from a despairing sufferer, brings a momentary relief sufficient to bring the child to the birth? One is glad to add, however, that many women have the courage to refuse altogether to submit to this shameful ordeal, insisting that their trouble is due, not to the wrath of the spirits, but to other causes, and that they will die rather than confess what is not true.

• 844 When birth has taken place, the cord is cut with a
846 bamboo knife, and the placenta buried in the family place of prayer, a small part protruding to leave a connection which insures further children. All this time no one in the house may swallow saliva. The father calls out to know the sex of the child, but he must not yet enter (for the party have entered the house as soon as possible after the birth). After a few days the mother is anointed with oil and shaved, along with her child, and powdered with medicine. Meantime intimation has been sent to the grandparents; a cock if a boy, a hen if a girl, telling them all that they wish to know. The mother may now resume her household duties.

851 But in about a week she goes to show the child to
603 her own parents, and at the end of her visit, which
431 lasts some weeks, great preparations are made by both

3: Mackenzie M-5 (ca. 1925) 1925
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757 the fang will drop out, and the man will be saved!
278 There are men living near me who claim to have seen this being done.

844 The birth of children is accompanied by loving care, gross superstition, and much medical treatment, useful or otherwise. All women at that time are given a drink of *indobo* leaves, pounded and mixed with water. If the placenta has not come away satisfactorily, castor oil is given. And if pain supervenes, the bark of *indobo* is again given, pounded and mixed with water. For a child weak at birth, roots of *unsuba* and *mungwina* are taken, pounded, mixed with water, and the child is washed in the
842 mixture. Sterility in man or woman can be removed by the right drugs; and when a woman is getting on in years and wishes no more children, a mixture is in
847 use which will have the desired effect. Medicines for producing abortion are widely known, and
832 frequently used, as also are love potions.

757 Steaming is resorted to in cases of great pain or weakness. Water is cooked in a large pot, with the bark of *mparampara* added. When the pot has boiled, it is taken off the fire, and the patient, covered with a mat, kneels over it, supported if very weak, for about ten minutes. Massaging also is employed when one is very tired, the leaves of *muyoka* being pounded to give a juice for lubrication, or, as the people themselves say, to get into the body through the pores. Cupping is employed for headache and rheumatic pains. Eight cuts are made in two lines, on each side of the head; a small horn is put over the cuts; a

4: Tew E-4 (no date) 1950 FN17 Ngonde FN17

witches, who use their power beneficently and spend their dreams in efforts to counteract the aggressor witches, *avalosi*, who use their power maliciously. The great commoner is the strongest of the former type, and the 'defender of the village'. A man who earns universal unpopularity is subject to a spiritual attack from the 'defenders', and is liable to fall sick from the blast of unpopularity. Belief in this efficacy of the 'breath of men' is one of the sanctions of the accepted social order.[1]

Only magic is believed to have power to punish wrongdoers who are neither kinsmen nor members of the same chiefdom. Magic exerts an influence on the behaviour of kinsmen and affines. The witchcraft of a neglected wife may cause a man to fall sick, or that of his father-in-law may harm his children.[2] The power of witchcraft never acts between relatives, though it might between husband and wife.[3]

An aggressor witch was reported in the old days by the great commoner to the chief, who ordered the poison ordeal. If the accused failed to vomit (the dose was seldom fatal), he was proved guilty and killed or exiled, all his cows and property being taken by the chief and the victims of his aggressive witchcraft. If a private individual accused another, both were put to the ordeal; if both vomited, the accuser had to pay two cows to the other for slander; if either failed to vomit he was punished as guilty. The ordeal is now illegal, but men accused of aggressive witchcraft still find it best to fly the chiefdom. Great commoners normally used their witchcraft powers to protect their chief from attack, but if he erred they would join in the attack on him; the nobles of Ngonde had power to exert a similar constitutional check on the Kyungu.[4]

If death by aggressive witchcraft was suspected, it was proved or disproved by a routine post-mortem examination and by subsequent consultation with the diviner.[5]

Birth

A child should be born in its own father's house. A difficult birth is a sign of the guilt of adultery, and is eased by confession.[6] A few days after the birth the mother is anointed, shaved, and resumes her household duties. She later goes on a visit of some weeks to show the child to her own parents, returning to her husband after celebration by both sets of grandparents, and exchanges of food and hoes. The birth of twins was a great misfortune, requiring the segregation and ritual purification of both parents.[7]

Initiation

There was no puberty or initiation rite for boys. The initiation of a girl was really a pre-marriage rite. She went through a complicated rite to ensure fertility, in which the husband took part. The initiation lasts some months, and includes several exchanges of food between the families of the girl and her betrothed husband, and ceremonies in which her girl friends of the same village and his friends of his village take part. The girl is tested for virginity during the ceremonies. If she is not betrothed before puberty the initiation is carried out in a modified form, but the full significance is lost.[8]

[1] Wilson, 2, 1936, p. 277.
[2] Ibid., 5, 1939, p. 38.
[3] Ibid., 1, 1936, p. 91.
[4] Ibid., p. 256.
[5] Johnston, 1897, p. 443.
[6] Wilson and Hunter, 1939, p. 10; Mackenzie, 1925, pp. 42–3.
[7] Ibid., pp. 44–8. According to H. H. Johnston, if the children died in succession the father was expected to kill himself, but it is possible that he is recounting a custom of the Southern Tumbuka (1897, p. 417).
[8] Ibid., 1925, p. 51; Wilson and Hunter, 1939, p. 11; Wilson, 2, 1936, p. 238.

9: Wilson E-5 (1934-1955) 1959
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643 778 cattle and protecting one's own, and to attract men to the country.

The two senior sons of a chief are given powdered *ikingila* to 785 drink from early childhood; at the 'coming out' they lie on it and 643 drink it again with their village headmen, some is buried beneath 778 their ritual trees, and the chief's homestead is treated with it periodically. One form of *ikingila* is made of the heart of a lion and the heart of a leopard, together with the scrapings from a charred root, and one of its qualities is to create lions or leopards which guard the trees under which it is buried. 'They make anyone who has cut a branch of one of the trees for firewood tremble at night, he trembles and returns the wood; they do not kill, but they stay roaring there until he repents.' Now part of the dignity (*ubusisya*) of a chief is that lions and leopards attend him; they roam his country; they are his familiars (*imbege*). 'The sons of Lwembe' [776] lack the fearful power of their great ancestor who 'rode a lion like a donkey', but they are believed to command familiars which clear the country of the wild pig that destroy men's gardens, and protect the sacred groves by terrifying any sacrilegious person who dares chop wood where he should fear. But they do not kill men or cattle. That is what distinguishes them from 'God's lions which kill cattle even by day' and the man-eaters made by sorcerers to [754] destroy those they hate. There is no hint of lycanthropy—our informants denied emphatically that chiefs, dead or alive, turned into *imbege*, but they 'follow the chief' when he travels.

A second *ikingila*, sprinkled on the chief's mat when he is secluded, and drunk with his two senior village headmen, is made of red, black, and shining white or yellow pebbles, which are ground up and mixed with *imbinga*, a medicine brought by the Kinga, but the symbolism of these ingredients remains obscure.

The greatest of the *ifingila*, used only for the chief himself, is *inyifwila*, a terrible substance with power perilously like that of witchcraft. When either of the senior wives of a chief gives birth [844] to a son a little is hidden in the litter on which she lies; it is put into the litter on which the heirs lie at the 'coming out'; and into the sacred tails and trumpets which are carried into battle. Like other medicines of chieftainship, *inyifwila* is used to give the chief majesty (*ubusisya*), 'that people who meet him may fear him'; that he and his warriors may appear fierce; that they may be 'heavy and strong' in war; that when the trumpet is blown it